

Penalized US 'not scared' of playing Argentina

BY STEVEN GOFF
WASHINGTON POST

HOUSTON — For two days, while awaiting an opponent in the Copa America Centenario semifinals, the U.S. national team went about its business as **MEN'S SOCCER** if the foe didn't matter.

The Americans were fixed on fitness, on resettlement in their ninth city over four weeks and on attempting to get two suspensions rescinded.

On Saturday night, as the outcome of the Argentina-Venezuela match came clear, they began to pivot.

The world's best soccer player, Lionel Messi, and the world's top-ranked soccer team, Argentina, would be joining them in Houston for Tuesday's showdown at NRG Stadium.

La Albiceleste secured passage with a 4-1 victory in Foxborough, Massachusetts, setting up the biggest match for the Americans since the 2014 World Cup and the most glamorous duel with a player since Cristiano Ronaldo two years ago in Brazil.

"We are not scared of them at all," U.S. Coach Jur-

gen Klinsmann said Sunday before training at Houston Sports Park. "We admire their players. This is now a special moment. I told the players yesterday before we started training, 'This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity now.' You got into the semifinal, you made yourself proud, but now go for more."

The U.S. delegation watched the Argentina match at the team hotel, in small groups and individually. Since defeating Ecuador on Thursday in Seattle, the Americans had a safe hunch who they would face next.

In his first start of the tournament, Messi scored once and assisted twice, and Gonzalo Higuain pocketed two early goals as Argentina remained perfect through four matches.

Trailing 2-0 late in the first half, Venezuela squandered a chance to make a game of it by failing to convert a penalty kick.

"There's a stretch of the beginning of the game where Argentina came out very sharp and into it," U.S. captain Michael Bradley said. "They get ahead, but at the same time, Venezuela had big chances to get back into



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Bobby Wood (left) of the United States reacts after receiving a yellow card during the June 17 game against Ecuador. Wood is among three U.S. players who must sit out Tuesday's Copa America semifinal against Argentina.

the game. On another day, the whole thing can play out a little differently."

While acknowledging the enormous challenge that lies ahead, Bradley also said, "We don't want to make this out to be a 'Mission Impossible.'"

The Americans have faced FIFA's top team 12 times since the governing body began the rankings in 1993. Three ended in victory: Brazil in the 1998 CONCACAF Gold Cup semifinals in Los Angeles, Spain in the 2009 FIFA Confederations

Cup semifinals in South Africa and Germany in an away friendly last year.

The Americans can draw most from the Spain upset because it was the most meaningful competition and featured an elite program at almost full strength and in peak form.

On that day, the Americans confronted Xavi Hernandez, Xabi Alonso and David Villa. On Tuesday, they will face Messi, the five-time world player of the year; Higuain, a lethal scorer in Europe for eight years; and Javier Mascherano, Messi's Barcelona teammate and the heart and soul for club and country.

"He's probably the best of all time," Bradley said of Messi. "But there are still plenty of examples of days when teams can collectively make the game hard on him and make space tight and force him to have to dribble sideways in moments, to put him on his right foot, to eliminate certain things and to have the mentality and commitment to do it over and over and over again for 90 minutes."

The Americans took on Messi once before, preventing him from overrunning them during a 1-1 friendly draw be-

fore almost 80,000 at the Meadowlands in March 2011.

In this Copa America, Messi sat out the group opener with a sore back and played a combined 74 minutes in the next two matches, notching a 19-minute hat trick against Panama, before going 90 against Venezuela.

"We are ready to bite, to fight, to chase them, to be all over them," Klinsmann said. "If we repeat that and add a couple more percent to it, it's going to be fun."

"We have to be on top of our game defensively à but that's a no-brainer à but we've done extremely well in the whole competition defensively."

The Americans have yet to concede a goal in the run of play through four matches; Argentina is among the best in the world in the run of play, mixing meticulous possession and toxic finishing.

The goals against the United States have come off a corner kick, penalty kick and free kick.

"We are 100 percent going in with the belief that we can play with them," defender Matt Besler said. "We'll see on Tuesday night. But you can't go into a game conceding that belief already."

Chiefs' Berry wins Halas Award

THE SPORTS XCHANGE

Kansas City Chiefs safety Eric Berry, who overcame a diagnosis of Hodgkin's Lymphoma in late 2014 to return to the field and have **NFL NOTEBOOK** season in 2015, has been selected as the 2016 George Halas Award winner by the Professional Football Writers of America.

Berry, the 47th Halas Award winner, is the first member of the Chiefs franchise to receive the honor, the PFWA announced Monday.

Other 2016 nominees for the Halas Award were New Orleans Saints cornerback Delvin Breaux, Carolina Panthers special teams coordinator Bruce DeHaven, Buffalo Bills guard Richie Incognito, Cincinnati Bengals quarterback Carson Palmer and New England Patriots offensive lineman Nate Solder.

Berry was involved in a collision with an Oakland Raiders player in a Nov. 20, 2014 game and noticed chest pain in the aftermath. Four days later, a cancerous mass was found inside his chest, and Berry was diagnosed with Hodgkin's Lymphoma.

Berry went through six rounds of chemotherapy treatment from Dec. 10, 2014 until May 13, 2015. Berry was declared cancer-free June 22, and he was on the field for the first training camp practice July 29.

The 27-year-old Berry returned to the Kansas City starting lineup in Week 2. He played in all 16 games (15 starts), was third on the team in tackles with 61 (55 solo) and had a pair of interceptions. He was voted to the 2015 PFWA All-NFL and All-AFC teams, earned a Pro Bowl berth and he was selected as the PFWA's 2015 Comeback Player of the Year.

The Chiefs used the franchise tag to retain Berry for this season.

Colts to induct Polian

The Indianapolis Colts will induct Pro Football Hall of Famer and former general manager Bill Polian into the team's Ring of Honor.

The ceremony will take place during halftime of the Colts' Week 17 game against the Jacksonville Jaguars on Sunday, Jan. 1, 2017.

Polian, who later had the title of president/vice chairman, spent 14 of his 32 NFL seasons with the Colts from 1998-2011. During his time in Indianapolis, the Colts won eight division championships, two conference championships and reached the Super Bowl twice.

Romo, Bryant to work out together

Dallas Cowboys quarterback Tony Romo and wide receiver Dez Bryant plan to work out together before the start of training camp in late July.

They only played in three games together last season as both players dealt with

injuries that helped sink the Cowboys to a 4-12 record.

Bryant was held out of team drills and most individual drills throughout the offseason program as he works his way back from foot surgery in January.

Bryant and the Cowboys have been cautious after he missed seven games in 2015 with a fractured foot. He said there will be plenty of time to get back on track with Romo as they work out together over the next six weeks.

49ers sign RB Gaskins

The San Francisco 49ers announced the signing of running back Kendall Gaskins to a two-year deal.

Gaskins originally was signed to the 49ers practice squad on Sept. 1, 2014, where he spent the remainder of the season.

Gaskins was promoted to the active roster on Oct. 31, and appeared in nine games, registering 16 carries for 38 yards while adding eight receptions for 69 yards.

UEFA

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Vardy fired just over the bar in the opening minutes, and then flicked on a header that set up a chance for strike partner Daniel Sturridge.

Soon after, Vardy out-sprinted fullback Martin Skrtel, running onto a long ball inside the penalty area but firing his shot straight at keeper Kozacik.

In one of England's best moves, a pass from Clyne set up Lallana for a stinging shot that forced a diving two-handed save from Kozacik.

For Slovakia, Viktor Pecovsky shot harmlessly over the bar, and Marek Hamsik wriggled clear of centre-half Gary Cahill and fired across the face of goal.

With Wales leading Russia at halftime, England came out for the second half knowing they needed to score in their quest to finish top.

They had one anxious moment in particular when a mix-up between goalkeeper Joe Hart and defender Chris



England's Nathaniel Clyne in action with Slovakia's Marek Hamsik.

Smalling nearly let in Robert Mak, but otherwise they continued to put Slovakia under pressure.

Clyne's shot from a narrow angle bounced off the keeper's shoulder and Alli, with his first touch after coming off the bench, forced a goal line clearance from Skrtel.

With Prince William, among the crowd, grinning and holding his head at a series of near-misses, England kept pushing for a goal but to no avail.

Hodgson now faces a potentially tougher route in the competition with France, Germany and Italy all in the

same half of the draw.

He also has a selection dilemma, especially after Clyne had an outstanding match in place of Walker, who excelled against Russia and Wales. Three games into the tournament, the England boss may still be searching for his best team.

Bangor wins American Legion Zone 1 opener

BANGOR — Peter Kemble, Brian Pierce and Jesse Colford combined to limit Skowhegan

LEGION BASEBALL

to one run on Monday to lead Bangor's Coffee News to a 4-1 Zone 1 Senior American Legion victory at Mansfield Stadium.

Kemble earned the win as he went the first five innings and struck out eight while giving up one run. Pierce

pitched 3 2/3 innings of scoreless relief with four strikeouts and Colford got an out on one pitch to earn the save.

Kyle Stevenson went 3-for-4 with an RBI and Kemble pitched in with two hits and an RBI. Andrew Hillier, Brian Pierce and Ryan Brookings added singles.

For Skowhegan, Evan Holzworth singled twice while Cody Lawyerson added an RBI single. Nate Ames, Chase Malloy and

Devon Watt added singles. Chase Malloy and Ryan Emery combined to allow eight hits.

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Kemble, Pierce (6), Colford (9) and Fournier, Huston (6); Malloy, Emery (7) and Emery, Malloy (7).

R.H. Foster 14, Motor City 4

At Hampden, Zach Nash

drove in three runs with two singles and Andrew Gendreau pitched seven innings to carry host R.H. Foster to a Zone 1 Senior American Legion Baseball win.

Troy Reynolds struck out six in two innings of relief for R.H. Foster, which received three hits from Tyler Beaton and a solo home run from Casey Sudbeck.

Ethan Stoddard and Nate DiSisto each had a double among Motor City's eight hits.